



Representatives

Grace Cole

Patty Butler

32nd District

1998 Session Report

May 1998

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your state representatives.

The 1998 Legislature began its work at a fast pace on January 12, and ended on time 60 days later. During that time Democrats and Republicans did their best work when bipartisan cooperation, not rhetoric, governed the development of issues. We worked together to pass tougher DUI laws, develop a policy for salmon recovery, improve ferry system service, stop energy deregulation, and provide more property-tax relief for seniors and disabled retirees.

Still, we're disappointed that, despite an \$860 million budget surplus, we failed to address some of the state's pressing needs. We didn't do anything to improve class size or funding for education, and certainly not enough to protect clean water. We left money on the table that could have provided health care for uninsured kids and did little to address hunger among children in our state. The transportation plan that passed does some good things, but is based on unsound policy. Higher education was treated as an afterthought, and part-time faculty concerns about fairness were not addressed.

This newsletter summarizes some of these issues. As always, we encourage you to contact us with your questions, opinions and suggestions for how we can serve you better.

Sincerely,

Grace Cole

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THE SESSION OF LOST OPPORTUNITY

This was a very disappointing year for people who care about public education. With an \$860 million reserve, the Legislature had an historic opportunity to improve funding for public schools, increase local control of education, and strengthen education reform. Instead, it further reduced funding for schools, imposed more state control on education, and weakened education reform.

Smaller class sizes — Our kids deserve better than the 4th-most crowded classrooms in the country. That's why I sponsored a bill to reduce class sizes in elementary and middle schools. It was rejected.

Volunteer reading corps — Gov. Locke's proposal for a Washington Reading Corps of volunteer tutors to teach reading to 82,000 elementary school kids had strong bipartisan support. But only one-third of the proposal was funded, reducing it to a summer school and vacation program.

Time for learning — Education supporters proposed "Time for Learning" grants to allow kids who need extra attention to get more help after-school or on Saturdays. It was rejected without a hearing.

All day kindergarten — I proposed a grant program to provide all-day kindergarten to schools where kids need it most. Democratic and Republican lawmakers embraced the idea, and proposed that it be made available statewide as soon as possible. The Education Committee supported it unanimously. Budget-writers refused to fund it.

Math achievement — The House Education Committee unanimously approved "excellence in mathematics grants," because recent tests show that 78 percent of Washington's fourth graders cannot meet the higher math standards required by education reform. It wasn't funded.

Technology for learning — Democrats also proposed to invest in training teachers to make the best use of educational technology, but the proposal wasn't given a hearing.

Phonics only

Instead of making these valuable improvements, we spent much of our time debating a bill that would have told teachers they must use only phonics to teach reading, even if that wasn't the best way to teach a particular child. Phonics is already used in over 90 percent of our classrooms, and is a valuable tool for teaching reading. But it is not the Legislature's job to reach into the classroom and tell teachers how to do their jobs. It is the Legislature's paramount duty to make ample — not minimal — provision for the education of all children. The education budget was cut \$50 million.

Education Reform

Instead of reaffirming the high academic standards envisioned for Washington's kids in the bipartisan education reform effort, the House voted to lower education reform standards by eliminating achievement requirements for civics, history and geography. An effort was also made to eliminate arts, health and fitness standards, but was narrowly defeated.



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Protecting the interests of senior citizens

Last year we made sweeping improvements to long-term care, to protect the health and dignity of vulnerable elderly citizens. This year we developed a new way of paying nursing homes, based on how sick the patient is rather than how much the home spends, to ensure the system is funded and fair for years to come. We took other actions to help seniors.

- We moved boarding home oversight from the Department of Health to the Department of Social and Health Services, which does better monitoring.
- We strengthened laws governing disabled parking permits and abuses.
- We increased income threshold for property tax exemptions for low-income seniors and disabled retirees from \$28,000 to \$30,000.
- We increased double-wide mobile home relocation assistance for those who are eligible.

No-nonsense DUI laws

Drunken drivers were involved in 46.5 percent of all traffic fatalities in our state in 1996, an increase of nine percent over the previous year. Traffic accidents that year claimed the lives of 712 Washington citizens. The carnage must stop.

Major proposals considered this year would establish these new DUI laws and penalties:

- Mandatory ignition interlocks for persons on deferred prosecution.
- Tougher punishment for highly intoxicated drivers, repeat offenders, and for repeat offenders who are convicted of vehicular homicide.
- Restricted use of deferred prosecution to once per lifetime and add an administrative license suspension.
- Lowered legal blood-alcohol content from .10 to .08.
- Impound DUI vehicles

Transportation plan short on solutions; heavy with debt

We'd like to say the Legislature debated a wise and workable transportation plan. Instead, what we faced was a take-it-or-leave-it proposition which we did not support. We believe the plan that passed does not offer a long-term solution. It calls for \$1.9 billion in bonds, payable in 25 years, for only five years' worth of projects. It does not provide real funding for city/county transportation projects, and most important, it poses a risk to future education funding, because for the first time, General Fund money, which pays for education and human services, will be funneled to the transportation account. We also object to the fact that it breaks the Initiative 601 spending limit for transportation, which the majority party refused to do for education. The transportation plan will be on the November ballot.

Kids' safety on wheels

- We passed "C.J.'s Bill" — named after a toddler killed by a delivery truck. This new law requires rear view mirrors or backup alert devices on delivery trucks.
- We also passed the "Cooper Jones" act — named after a young bicycle racer killed in an accident. It promotes bicycle and pedestrian safety through establishment of traffic safety programs.



Confronting major challenges

This year the Legislature laid the groundwork for resolving these major natural-resource challenges:

- Bringing salmon back to our waters, and keeping the restoration effort under state control.
- Balancing the water needs of fish with the economic realities of growth and development.
- Protecting public health from toxic waste, both natural and man-made.

Saving our salmon

February brought the announcement that Puget Sound chinook are threatened with extinction. We have one year to come up with a recovery plan or face possible federal control of our water, land and fish. Republicans joined Democrats in taking the first steps this session towards saving salmon:

- Establishing a salmon recovery office to coordinate the multiple efforts taking place; establishing an independent science panel to ensure solutions are based on science; requiring habitat restoration work be scheduled for most effectiveness; requiring a “state of the salmon report.”
- Creating a pilot program in the southwest for steelhead recovery.

Our efforts to provide money specifically for clean water and restoring fish and wildlife enforcement officers — essential components of salmon recovery were not approved by budget-writers.

Protecting clean water

We will keep a closer eye on how much dairy waste flows into Washington’s rivers and streams. While legislation was passed to require that dairies be inspected and have management plans to prevent waste from polluting, the budget did not provide all the funding that Ecology said was needed for inspectors.

Fertilizer safety

Last summer, The Seattle Times’ series, “Fear in the Fields” revealed that industrial waste comprised of heavy metals is often mixed into fertilizers. We passed Gov. Locke’s legislation making Washington the first in the nation to monitor, regulate, and inform citizens about heavy metals and dioxins in fertilizers.

Keeping shellfish safe to eat

I sponsored a new law that will help stabilize safety of the shellfish industry by more closely monitoring shellfish handling certification and keeping those who lose certification away from any aspect of shellfish processing.

Higher education — investing in the future

With our economy booming and state coffers overflowing, this year we thought we would be able to make real progress in opening the doors of higher education to working families. Unfortunately, the only significant action in higher education was to add a student regent at our four-year schools.

Missed opportunities:

- The Higher Education Endowment Fund would have reversed the “brain drain” at our colleges and universities by allowing schools to make competitive salary offers to top-notch faculty. Budget-writers did not make a down-payment on this public-private partnership.
- Budget-writers cut 500 enrollments at WSU, and resisting efforts to add enrollments at the UW and Evergreen.
- Budget-writers ignored our proposal to boost financial aid to help 3,700 more students afford college.
- Our part-time faculty at our community colleges are severely underpaid and don’t get equal benefits for equal work. Efforts to provide them with fair pay and benefits in the budget were ignored.

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Rep. Grace Cole

This is my last newsletter to you as your state representative, as I will be retiring from public office at the end of this term. You have given me the privilege of serving you in this position for the past 15 years, and I have more wonderful memories of those years than I could begin to relate. It has been a pleasure serving my constituents, who have always given such strong support to education of our youth, for the environment, and meeting the needs of senior citizens. But the personal satisfaction of hoping I have made a positive difference in the lives of the people of my district and the state, especially our children, is more reward than anyone could hope for. I will continue working for you until January. After that, though I will no longer be in this position, I will still be

Your friend and neighbor,

Grace Cole
Grace



Rep. Patty Butler (left) congratulates Clare McNaughton of Shoreline, widow of Stanley O. McNaughton, philanthropist and financial CEO of PEMCO. The late Mr. McNaughton was awarded the Washington State Medal of Merit posthumously.

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TOWN HALL MEETING NOTICE

Join Grace and Patty at a Town Hall Meeting
to discuss issues from the Legislative Session.

Thursday, May 14

Shoreline Library
345 NE 175th

7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

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